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THIRD REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN SIERRA LEONE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 16 of Security Council resolution 1132 (1997) of 8 October 1997 and to the presidential statement of 14 November 1997 (S/PRST/1997/52). It covers developments in Sierra Leone since my second report, dated 5 December 1997 (S/1997/958).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1132 (1997)

Dispatch of a technical survey team

2. By a letter dated 16 December 1997 (S/1997/980), the President of the Security Council conveyed to me the support expressed by members of the Council for the implementation of the two proposals I had made in my previous report, namely, the dispatch of a technical survey team to Sierra Leone and the reopening of a small liaison office in Sierra Leone.

3. Between 10 and 17 January 1998, a technical survey team led by my Special Envoy to Sierra Leone, Mr. Francis G. Okelo, visited Conakry, Monrovia and Freetown. The objectives of the visits were to assess the political, military and security situation in Sierra Leone, to discuss with the junta the implementation of the peace agreement signed in Conakry on 23 October 1997, to consult with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the planning undertaken so far by its Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, to carry out the military tasks listed in the Conakry Agreement and to examine installations and infrastructure in the subregion, including airports and seaports, medical facilities, engineering works and the availability and reliability of equipment, supplies and services that might be used by a future United Nations military presence, should the Security Council decide to deploy one.

4. During its visit, the team met three times in Conakry with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and members of his Cabinet, who welcomed the proposals contained in my previous report, and with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea and other Guinean government officials. With the full cooperation of the Guinean Government and the assistance of Guinean officials, the team also inspected the airport, seaport and medical facilities in Conakry.

5. In a statement issued in Conakry on 17 January 1998, President Kabbah welcomed the efforts of my Special Envoy to secure the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and the visit of the technical survey team to Freetown. He placed particular emphasis on the need for an early deployment of ECOMOG troops and United Nations military observers in Sierra Leone. On 24 January, Mr. Okelo met in Lungi, Sierra Leone, with Vice-President Albert Demby and held extensive discussions with him on the various aspects of the peace plan. As part of his consultations with all parties involved in the Sierra Leonean peace process, my Special Envoy also held meetings with representatives of Sierra Leonean civil society and organizations based in Conakry in order to apprise them of the efforts the United Nations was making to help implement the Conakry Agreement.

6. In Monrovia, members of the team met with ECOMOG High Command officers to discuss the concept of operations drawn up for the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, including the development of plans for the deployment of ECOMOG troops inside Sierra Leone beyond their present bases, and for disarming and demobilizing the Sierra Leonean combatants.

7. In their discussions with the ECOMOG Force Commander and other senior officers, members of the team found that some effort had been made to identify the logistical and equipment requirements of the ECOMOG force, and some preliminary planning had been initiated. On 24 January 1998, my Special Envoy received an outline plan for ECOMOG deployment and the ECOMOG concept of operations, but much remains to be done before the United Nations could be in a position to draw up its own comprehensive plans, which, in accordance with the Conakry Agreement, must be based on an ECOMOG concept of operations.

8. In Freetown, the team met with the political and military leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) for a series of general and technical discussions. The team also visited United Nations House in the centre of the city. While the vehicles and some other equipment that had been previously positioned in the United Nations warehouse for use in a possible peacekeeping operation had been looted, the United Nations offices, including the office of my Special Envoy, had been maintained in working condition by the local staff.

9. The team performed the necessary technical on-site inspections, including inspection of the seaport, heliport and airfield infrastructure, warehouses and storage facilities and locations for office accommodation and living quarters in Freetown. While many of these had suffered looting and sustained damage and neglect, the team considered that with a certain amount of rehabilitation work they could be rendered usable in the event of a United Nations deployment.

Security situation

10. The technical survey team found that while the junta appeared to be in control of Freetown, the security situation in the countryside remained highly volatile and did not allow the United Nations group to travel outside the capital. In its discussions with its various interlocutors, the team received reports that military activity was persisting in the east and south of the country, particularly around Bo and Kenema. Intensified guerrilla-style actions against the junta forces were being conducted by an organization called the Civil Defence Unit (CDU). CDU, which apparently comprises the Kamajors and similar groupings of traditional village-based hunters in the north and centre of the country, claims to control all major roads in Sierra Leone.

11. In a statement released on 9 January 1998, CDU indicated that it would cooperate with the implementation of the Conakry Agreement only in the event of a firm commitment by the junta to abide by its provisions, the rapid deployment of ECOMOG throughout Sierra Leone and the disarmament of all combatants, including RUF and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLMF). The representative of CDU whom the technical survey team met in Conakry, citing security considerations, declined to give the team any detailed indication of the size, armament or distribution of the CDU forces, which are led by Chief Hinga Norman, the Deputy Defence Minister in President Kabbah's Government.

12. According to information received from a variety of sources familiar with conditions in the countryside, the situation in and around the southern town of Bo is extremely tense. The food situation gives rise to particular concern, since the food stocks on which the civilian population of the town depends are running low. Attacks on civilians using the road to Bo have reportedly led to fatalities. In the meantime, fighting has also escalated in other parts of the country.

Meetings between the technical survey team and the junta

13. In his meetings with the Chairman of AFRC, Mr. Johnny Paul Koroma, and other military and political leaders, my Special Envoy reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to the full and timely implementation of the Conakry Agreement and of Security Council resolution 1132 (1997), as well as the need to adhere strictly to the timetable for the restoration of constitutional government on 22 April 1998. Mr. Koroma and other members of the junta claimed that, in their view, three issues stood in the way of the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, namely:

(a) The need for the immediate release of Corporal Foday Sankoh, the Deputy Chairman of the junta and head of RUF, who is currently in Nigeria;

(b) The need to exempt RSLMF from the disarmament exercise;

(c) The need to address the "dominant role played by the Nigerian contingent in ECOMOG".

14. In renewing the formal commitment of the junta to the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, Mr. Koroma stressed the need for concrete and timely action to achieve its objectives within the six-month time frame set out therein. He put forward proposals that he claimed were aimed at addressing the three issues mentioned above, as well as other outstanding matters not dealt with in detail in the Agreement. According to the junta, the proposals would require the establishment of the following four committees:

(a) A coordinating and general-purpose committee;

(b) A disarmament, demobilization and reintegration committee;

(c) A humanitarian assistance coordinating committee;

(d) A committee on the formation of a broad-based government of national unity.

Mr. Koroma proposed that, in addition to the junta, the membership of the committees would include, as appropriate, representatives of the ECOWAS Committee of Five, ECOMOG, international and national non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.

15. The junta also asserted that the confidence-building measures contained in the Conakry Agreement had not been carried out, including the assessment visit that was to have been conducted on 20 November 1997 by the ECOWAS Committee of Five Ministerial Assessment Team and the provision of humanitarian assistance. The junta expressed its readiness for dialogue with ECOWAS, as provided for in the Agreement, to resolve the issues it said were blocking the implementation of the Agreement and, in that context, welcomed the arrival of the technical survey team and the proposal to reopen a liaison office. It indicated that the deployment of United Nations military observers would also be welcome.

16. The junta also made strong representations to the team concerning what it considered to be the use of excessive force by ECOMOG in subjecting Freetown and other locations in Sierra Leone to naval and aerial bombardment. It also complained of the harmful effects on the civilian population of what it considered to be overly vigorous enforcement of both ECOWAS and United Nations sanctions by ECOMOG forces.

17. The technical survey team presented to the junta a detailed list of questions concerning plans that should have been made by the junta for the disarmament and demobilization of its combatants and confidence-building measures that the junta itself could take in order to demonstrate its commitment to the implementation of the Agreement. In reply to those questions, the junta, in reaffirming its commitment to the Conakry Agreement, cited numerous provisions of the Abidjan Peace Agreement (S/1996/1034, annex) signed by the Government of Sierra Leone and RUF on 30 November 1996, as well as of the Conakry Agreement. The junta's reply also recalled the proposals made by Mr. Koroma, which are outlined in paragraphs 13 to 15 above. The junta's reply to the technical questions posed by the team, which was received on 20 January 1998, will be taken into account in future discussions of the role to

be played by the United Nations based on the comprehensive concept of operations to be finalized by ECOMOG (see para. 36 below).

18. The team requested from the junta further information concerning reports that it had enlarged an airstrip at Magburaka and had received deliveries of weapons there in violation of the embargo imposed by the Security Council in its resolution 1132 (1997). Those deliveries reportedly included surface-to-air missiles and other matériel allegedly paid for by the sale of diamonds mined in Sierra Leone. The junta has denied those reports, and the team was unable to verify them. During and after its stay in Freetown, the team encountered persistent reports that illegal arms sales were being paid for by the sale of diamonds. Members of the junta have also travelled outside the country in violation of the travel ban imposed by the Council in resolution 1132 (1997).

Other action taken pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997)

19. On 8 January 1998 the Chairman of ECOWAS and Head of State of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha, wrote to inform me of the outcome of the seventh meeting of the ECOWAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Committee of Five on Sierra Leone, held in Abuja on 19 December 1997.

20. The ministers noted that there had been some violations of the ECOWAS and United Nations sanctions imposed on the junta in Sierra Leone. Those violations related specifically to the arms embargo and travel restrictions imposed on members of the illegal regime and their families. The ministers therefore called upon all countries and, in particular, ECOWAS member States, to adhere strictly to those sanctions. They also requested countries harbouring members of the military junta, their families and all others on the restricted list to repatriate such persons to Sierra Leone.

21. The Ministers were informed of the upgrading of an airstrip at Magburaka into a full-fledged airport by the illegal regime for the illegal importation of arms and other supplies in violation of the sanctions. The ministers mandated ECOMOG to ensure that the airstrip was not used. General Abacha stated in his letter that the delays in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement were attributable solely to lack of cooperation on the part of the junta and its continued intransigence, and he accused them of stalling for time. In addition, he said, the junta had continued to carry out unprovoked attacks on ECOMOG peacekeepers.

22. Stating the need for ECOWAS and the United Nations to implement the Agreement without further delay, General Abacha requested that I help accelerate efforts towards the deployment of a United Nations military observer mission to Sierra Leone and to solicit the assistance of the international community for the operations of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone.

23. Since my previous report, a number of States have reported to me, in compliance with paragraph 13 of resolution 1132 (1997), concerning the steps they have taken to give effect to the provisions contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the resolution relating to the sanctions imposed by the Council on Sierra Leone. Those countries are Australia, Austria, Brazil, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Greece, Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg (on behalf of

the European Union), Norway, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

24. On 15 January 1998, the United Kingdom Special Representative for Sierra Leone, Mr. John Flynn, visited United Nations Headquarters to participate in an ad hoc meeting of donors and other interested parties convened by the British Government. The purpose of the meeting was to consider what additional steps could be taken by the international community to support the work of ECOWAS in facilitating the implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

25. The parties reached a number of conclusions concerning the finalization by ECOMOG of a comprehensive concept of operations and the identification of its logistical and equipment requirements; the establishment of a trust fund to assist ECOMOG; the deployment of United Nations military personnel, subject to authorization by the Security Council; and the serious humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone.

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

26. The humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone has continued to deteriorate. In the absence of new supplies of food aid, commercial food is increasingly scarce and expensive in urban areas. This is primarily attributable to the overall decline in the country as a result of the 25 May 1997 coup as well as the scarcity of fuel, which has a direct impact on food prices because of increased transportation costs. In Freetown, the price of the main staple, rice, has tripled since the coup, severely affecting the population. Attempts by the authorities to fix the price of rice at an artificially low level have proved unsuccessful, since wholesalers have merely withheld stocks, preferring to sell in more attractive consumer markets in mining areas or to trade on the black market. The reduced purchasing power of the civilian population since the coup has exacerbated the already precarious situation.

27. In rural areas in the southern and eastern provinces the situation is particularly acute, as food distribution has also been affected by the deteriorating security situation resulting from intensified conflict between the Kamajors and the AFRC/RUF, now known as the People's Army, during December 1997. The benefits of the abundant rice harvest have been negated by looting and the increased incidence of rural "food taxes" imposed on civilians by armed elements, which cause farmers to hoard their harvest rather than risk transporting it to market. In the towns of Bo and Kenema the situation is particularly severe, as the amount of food being imported into those areas is negligible. As a result, the civilian population is entirely dependent on existing supplies.

28. Existing stocks of relief food within Sierra Leone are almost exhausted, as no food aid has entered Sierra Leone since the coup. The resulting virtual halt in food aid distribution has already had an impact on the beneficiaries of vulnerable group feeding programmes, institutions such as hospitals and the internally displaced, currently estimated at 150,000 people. The 5,500 Liberian

refugees in Freetown are particularly vulnerable, since they lack the family support structures available to Sierra Leoneans.

29. Although humanitarian agencies have continued to transport modest quantities of medical and other non-food supplies across the Guinean border, those operations have been insufficient to meet the growing needs of a collapsing primary health care system. Significant quantities of supplies, together with logistics and personnel support, are required to conduct a much-needed child immunization campaign.

30. The requirement that ECOMOG inspect humanitarian shipments at the border of Sierra Leone and Guinea has now been entrusted by ECOWAS to the Guinean army. However, the Government of Guinea has also requested that ECOWAS provide inspectors to supervise the task of the Guinean troops. ECOWAS has requested United Nations assistance in financing this deployment of inspectors, and United Nations agencies have indicated that they will do this on a cost-sharing basis.

31. In view of the concerns expressed in the Security Council and by others, a United Nations inter-agency assessment mission will be sent to Sierra Leone at the beginning of February to undertake a technical analysis of the humanitarian situation, including the humanitarian impact of sanctions, and to consider the difficulties encountered by humanitarian agencies in providing assistance to vulnerable groups.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

32. Although the junta claims that it remains committed to the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the situation in Sierra Leone remains deeply preoccupying and requires the urgent attention of the international community. In particular, it is important to develop and finalize the necessary deployment, disarmament and demobilization plans if the Conakry Agreement is to be implemented and the constitutional order restored in accordance with the timetable envisaged in the Agreement. It would therefore be premature at this stage to present to the Security Council a full concept of operations or an estimate of force size and structure in respect of a possible United Nations military presence in Sierra Leone.

33. My Special Envoy stands ready to assist in efforts to overcome the obstacles blocking the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. In this context, I welcome the proposed convening in New York of the Ministerial Meeting of the Committee of Five, which could give a much-needed impetus to the process of dialogue as well as to the full and timely implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

34. I also intend to re-establish the United Nations liaison office in Sierra Leone, initially staffed with a political officer, a military adviser and a humanitarian officer under the direction of my Special Envoy and supported by the necessary staff, including a security officer. In due course, the liaison office could be expanded to comprise human rights and information officers. The staff of the office would maintain contacts with the members of the junta and civil society in Sierra Leone. The Special Envoy and his staff would also

facilitate talks with the junta and with ECOWAS and ECOMOG on various aspects of the implementation of the Agreement. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Development Programme in Freetown and to all United Nations staff members there for their steadfastness in remaining at their posts in often trying conditions.

35. At the same time, I invite the Security Council to consider the deployment of a small military liaison cell of up to 10, with the necessary support staff, to assess and report on the military situation within Sierra Leone and coordinate with ECOMOG and with other United Nations agencies in the areas of ECOMOG deployment, in the capital and, conditions permitting, in other areas of the country. I will seek the necessary security guarantees from all parties. In my view, the presence of the military liaison cell, which would operate under the authority of my Special Envoy, would also signal the commitment of the Council and the international community to the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and would serve as an important confidence-building measure. I recommend that the costs related to the military liaison cell be met through peacekeeping assessments, and I intend to present this recommendation to the General Assembly in due course.

36. My Special Envoy and his staff will also maintain the contacts they have established both with the ECOMOG High Command and the junta with a view to assisting in the finalization of a comprehensive concept of operations for deployment throughout Sierra Leone and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of Sierra Leonean combatants into civilian life. United Nations planning would be completed on the basis of such a concept as well as the operational data acquired during the visit of the technical survey team.

37. The United Nations will work with the international community to try to generate the logistical, technical and financial support that will be required for ECOWAS to pursue its efforts to carry out the Conakry Agreement. I call upon Member States to stand ready to offer generous assistance in this regard.

38. I note that the ECOWAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Committee of Five on Sierra Leone on 19 December 1997 called upon all countries and, in particular, on ECOWAS member States to adhere strictly to the sanctions. Reports of persistent violations of the Security Council arms embargo are of great concern, as such violations could seriously impede the peace process.

39. The continuing efforts being made by the ECOWAS Committee of Five on Sierra Leone and its Chairman, Chief Tom Ikimi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, deserve commendation and support. Particular appreciation is also due to the Government of Guinea for the preparations it has been making for the long-awaited launch of cross-border humanitarian operations in Sierra Leone and for the support and assistance it extended to my Special Envoy and to the technical survey team during its visit.

40. At the same time, I am concerned at the plight of civilians affected by the strict enforcement of sanctions on Sierra Leone and by the conduct of hostilities within the country, including in the area around Bo. The report of the inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission that will visit Sierra Leone early in February to analyse the humanitarian situation and the effect of

sanctions on the civilian population should facilitate the early start of cross-border humanitarian relief efforts in order to alleviate the suffering of innocent civilians. I salute the people of Sierra Leone for the forbearance with which they are enduring their ordeal, and wish to assure them that the United Nations, in close cooperation with ECOWAS, will continue to do everything in its power to facilitate the restoration of the constitutional order in their country.

41. I will keep the Security Council informed of further United Nations activity and other developments in Sierra Leone in the weeks to come.